LINGERING EDUCATIONAL
DISPUTES:
THE DEWEY - RUSSELL DEBATE

Guest Editor: John M. Novak, Brock University
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LINGERING EDUCATIONAL DISPUTES: 
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Editor’s Introduction

John M. Novak
Brock University

During their lifetimes, John Dewey and Bertrand Russell had many and varied interactions. To say the least, it was quite an interesting relationship. Although Dewey died in 1952 and Russell in 1970, the spirit of their work lives on in the John Dewey Society and the Bertrand Russell Society. However, unlike their namesakes, the members of these respective societies have had only limited contact. This edition of Current Issues in Education looks again at the similarities and differences between Dewey’s and Russell’s respective approaches to philosophy and education to see what issues are still current and what possibilities there are for further conversation.

The introductory paper by Tim Madigan, a member of both the John Dewey Society and the Bertrand Russell Society, presents an overview of some basic similarities and differences in their approaches to philosophy and education. Focusing on Dewey’s work with "The Laboratory School" and Russell’s work with Beacon Hill School, he provides comparative insights into their educational aims, principles, and daily practices. His paper ends by pointing out the hopes and limitations of both educational endeavors.

In the second paper, Michael Rockler, President of the Bertrand Russell Society, provides more background on Russell’s educational life and writings, claiming these enabled Russell to add dimensions that were missing from Dewey’s pragmatic approach. Pointing out a variety of philosophical and educational differences, he argues that Dewey was naively hopeful about unbridled democracy in both schools and society.

The final paper, by John Novak, is a response to Rockler’s criticisms of Dewey’s pragmatism and educational thinking. Arguing that both Russell and Rockler displayed limited understanding of Dewey’s mature philosophical work, he provides some key
points taken from twelve books written by Dewey from 1916 to 1938. Then, using Dewey's mature philosophy as a guide, he responds to eight specific charges mentioned by Rockler.

The hope of this edition of *Current Issues in Education* is that the conversation between members of the John Dewey Society and other organizations will continue. The last section of this publication is an announcement from Peter Hlebowitsh, the new editor of *Current Issues in Education*, discussing the new directions he sees for this endeavor.

It has been a pleasure serving as guest editor. I would like to thank Tim Madigan and Michael Rockler for their papers and for inviting me to participate in the Dewey-Russell debate at the Humanist Conference in Toronto in June, 1992. It was a highly stimulating affair. I look forward to continuing the conversation and to more issues of *Current Issues in Education*. Finally I would like to thank John Xing and Tony Mollica for their editorial expertise. Without their help *Current Issues in Education* would have remained mere speculation.